

TRADITIONS OF TIRTHAS IN INDIA

*the
anthropology of
Hindu pilgrimage*

Traditions of Tirthas in India

the anthropology of Hindu pilgrimage

BAIDYANATH SARASWATI

1985

NK Bose Memorial Foundation
Varanasi

© 1983 NK BOSE MEMORIAL FOUNDATION, VARANASI

Rs. 50

**Published by R L Maurya, for N K Bose Memorial Foundation
B 8/9, Bara Gambhir Singh, Varanasi 221001
Printed at Ratna Printing Works, Kamachha, Varanasi 221010**

CONTENTS

1. Introduction 1
2. Conceptual Categories 2
 - Tirtha 2
 - Kshetra 8
 - Mandala 10
 - Peetha 10
3. Structure and Organization 12
 - Physiognomy of tirthas 12
 - Anthropomorphization of tirthas 13
 - The lay-out of the tirthas 14
 - Organization of sacred space 15
 - Organization of tirtha functionaries 17
 - Devadasis 18
4. Sacred Performances 20
 - Circumambulation 21
 - Kshetra-sannyasa 22
 - Garbha-vasa 22**
 - Kalpa-vasa 22**
 - Austerities 22
 - The holy bath 23
 - Religious suicide 24**
 - Animal-sacrifice 25
 - Anim l-worship 26
 - Tonsure of women 27
 - Pinda-dana 27
 - Miscellaneous tirtha practices 28
 - Festivals 30**
5. Diversities in Traditions 32
 - Diversity of categories 32
 - Diversity of performances 33
 - Diversity of the performers 33
 - Diversity of regional cultures 35
 - Distribution of culture traits 36
6. Unity in Diversities 39
 - Notes 42
 - References 44

Introduction

The concept of 'sacred complex' ranges across widely diverse dimensions. One of the dimensions which I have suggested elsewhere¹ displays the resilience of secular institutions running along the sacerdotal system. Much of it has been obtained from the self-view of the 'insiders' of a *tirtha* (sacred site, place of pilgrimage), of the people living there as citizens, not pilgrims. What emerged in this study was unconventional but refreshing. In conclusion, it was noted that, unlike Semitic cultures, in Indian tradition the sacred is in tune with the secular and hence we cannot possibly draw an exclusive model of the sacred complex to which the secular would be peripheral.

Another dimension of the sacred complex, which awaits examination and which indeed is of prime importance, relates itself to a synchronic-diachronic view of the organization of its traditions. From what I have seen of the major *tirthas*, it is almost obvious to me that various regions of India have organized their traditions of the sacred complex variously. The study of Kashi has already shown that it creates and accommodates varieties of sacred traditions. But if this is so, then what is the basis for the relationship between one tradition and another? How could the unity of a civilization come about through pilgrimage? And why was the diversity of traditions allowed to perpetrate? These are some of the basic questions which must be examined closely to achieve such understanding of the traditions of *tirthas* as is still lacking in anthropological literature. To begin with, let us seek to answer the foremost question. How did the textual authorities conceive the form of *tirthas*?

Tirtha

The Vedic word *tirtha*² (Pali, Prakrita-*tittha*), from *ter*, *tarate*, means ford, steps to river, place of pilgrimage. In course of time its meaning and scope were extended to all things held to be pure and holy. *Tirthas* exist in various forms, namely speech, water, land, body, limbs, time, trees, places resorted to by gods, places where there are images of gods, and so on. The feet of a Brahmin, the back of a cow, the limb of one's own wife, one's own eyes and the right ear are *tirthas*.³ The part at the little finger of a twice-born man is called the *tirtha* sacred to Prajapati ; the part at the root of the thumb is called *tirtha* sacred to Brahman; the part at the tops of the fingers is called the *tirtha* sacred to gods; and the part of the root of the forefinger is called the *tirtha* sacred to the manes.⁴ One finds mention of *kala-tirthas*⁵ (i. e. *tirthas* in the form of auspicious time) which are said to be Vaishnava, Shakta and Shaiva. The days and occasions regarded as *kala-tirthas* are Varah-dvadashi in Margasirsha-shukla-paksha, Ananta-chaturdasi in Bhadra-shukla-paksha, the day for worship of Karttikeya in the month of Kartika, the time for the study of the *Puranas*, and so on. Months have been classified into *Saura* (solar) and *Chandra* (lunar) ; of these, Asadha, Kartika, Magh, and Vaisakha are *tirthas*.⁶ Places where *agnihotra* and *sraddha* are performed, a temple, a house where the Veda is being studied, a cowpen, the place where a *soma* drinker dwells, parks, a place where the *asvattha* exists, a place where the

Purana is being recited or where one's teacher stands or where a chaste housewife dwells or where a father and a worthy son dwell are *tirthas*.⁷ Sanctity is caused to place by the presence of lotus-plants, *tulasi* (basil) plants, and *bilva* (wood-apple) trees.⁸ Water has been considered as a potent agent in the removal of sin. Holy or consecrated water is *tirtha*. Particular sanctity has been attached to river-fords, certain divine waters, also mountains and forests.

Tirthas are held to be holy (on three grounds, viz.) on account of some wonderful natural characteristic of the locality, or on account of the peculiar strikingness (or grandeur) of some watery place, or on account of the fact that some (holy) sages resorted to them (for bathing, austerities, etc.). *Tirtha*, therefore, means a locality or spot or expanse of water which gives rise to the accumulation of righteousness (merit) owing to its own peculiar nature without any adventitious circumstance⁹ (such as the presence of *salagrama* near it). Its antiquity is evidenced by literature of Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism.

In the *Rigveda*,¹⁰ waters, rivers in general and certain rivers mentioned by name are referred to with great reverence as divine and are deified. In the hymns of the *Atharvaveda*¹¹ waters are described as holy and purifying, and invoked to heal various kinds of diseases and to confer happiness and prosperity. The confluence of rivers and the valleys of mountains have been described in the *Vedas* as especially holy. The sanctity of the rivers and mountains has been stressed in the *Smritis*, the *Dharmasutras*, and the *Puranas*. In these scriptures, particularly in the *Puranas*, pilgrimage to holy places, holy mountains, and holy rivers has been highly lauded as the remover of sins (*paap*) and bestower of merits (*punya*). Some of the *Puranas* such as *Shands*, *Padma* and *Narada* however emphasize on one's personal purity and virtue as essential qualifications¹² for obtaining the full merit of pilgrimage. It is in this context that truth, compassion and self-restraint have been called *manas-tirthas*. Similarly, Brahmins (the virtuous ones) are said to be *jangam* (mobile) *tirtha*; places of pilgrimage are *sthavar* *tirthas*. Parents, preceptors, husbands and wife are also *tirtha*.

The *Mahaparinibban Suttan* mentions the four holy places of the Buddhists, namely Lumbini, Gaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar. Places such as Rajgriha, Vaishali, Mankul Parvata, Sunsmargiri, Parileyak, Nala and Vairanja where the Buddha used to spend the rainy season (*varsavasa*) every year have been described as holy. The places where he performed miracles are also considered holy : such are Sankasya where he is believed to have descended from heaven, Vaishali where monkeys offered him honey, Rajgriha where he subdued a mad elephant, and Sravasti where he performed the miracle of reduplicating himself. The eight original places where the relics of the Buddha were kept and the *stupas* erected thereon became especially holy for the Buddhists. Buddhists from all the world over visit these holy places periodically with a view to acquiring merits.

In Jain scriptures, the *jin shasana (dharma)* is itself the 'real' *tirtha*. The one who creates *tirtha* is Tirthankara. The places associated with the conception, birth, contemplation, *kaivalya* and *nirvana* of all the twenty-four Tirthankaras are holy for the Jains. These *tirthas* are spread all over India. They have been divided into two classes : *siddha-kshetra* and *atisaya-kshetra*. The places where the Tirthankaras and other holy men have attained *nirvana* are *siddha-kshetra*; those which have assumed importance because of temples, idols, or certain miraculous events are the *atisaya-kshetra*.

Thus, in all the major cultural traditions of India the concept of *tirtha* as sacred has appeared prominently. While some scriptures have laid too much stress on pilgrimage to sacred spots as the most effective means of expiation for all sins, others have laid importance on the righteous way of life in addition to it. But, in either case the importance of a sacred spot, because of its association with either gods or saints or founders of faith, has been recognized.

There are countless *tirthas*. The list¹³ given in all the major *Puranas* and the *Mahabharata* is very large and yet incomplete. According to the *Brahma Purana*¹⁴ their number is so large that

they cannot be enumerated in detail even in hundreds of years. The *Matsya Purana*¹⁵ (110.7) declares that there are 35 millions of *tirthas* in *divi* (sky), in *antariksha* (the aerial regions), and on *bhuri* (the earth) and all of them are located in the *Ganga*; the *Vamana Purana* gives this figure for the *lingas* alone. The *Sabdakalpadruma*, which has utilised this form of literature more than any other indigenous work of reference, presents a more realistic picture of the *tirthas* by arranging 264 of them in the order of their due circumambulation from the left to the right.

Many *tirthas* are named in one place. It is believed that thirty-three crores of *tirthas* are located in *Kashi* but in actual enumeration none of the *Puranas* has mentioned more than three hundred names. Similarly, the *Mahabharata* (*Vanaparva* 82.21) remarks that all the ten crores of *tirthas* are present in *Pushkar*; this obviously does not indicate their actual number. The 200 *yojana* long *Godavari* is also believed to have three crores and a half of *tirthas* in it. Thus, in a major *tirtha* are enshrined several important and cognate *tirthas* which may be called its *upa-tirtha*.

The *Brahma Purana* (70.16-9) classifies *tirthas* into four divisions, namely *daiva* (created by gods), *asura* (those associated with *asuras*), *arsa* (those established by sages), and *manus* (created by kings like *Ambarisa*, *Manu*, and *Kuru*). *Kasi*, *Pushkara* and *Prabhava* are sanctified by all the three gods. The *Sarasvati* springs from *Brahma*, the *Ganga* from *Vishnu*, and the *Narmada* from *Shiva*. Among *tirthas* called *daiva* are the *Ganga*, the *Yamuna*, the *Sarasvati*, the *Jhelam*, the *Beas*, the *Godavari*, the *Bhima*, the *Tungabhadra*, the *Krisna-veni*, the *Tapti*, and the *Pain-Ganga*. Reservoirs which are not due to human labour are called *daivakhata* (dug by god). *Gaya* is an *asura tirtha*. *Naranarayana* is an *arsa tirtha*. These classes of *tirthas* are assigned to the *Krita*, *Treta*, *Dvapara*, and *Kali yugas*.

Most of the writers of digests (*nibandhas* and *mahtamagranthas*) on *tirthas* have described some *tirthas* as more meritorious than others.¹⁶ The *Tirthakalpataru* of *Lakshmidhar*, one of the earliest digests (about 1110-1120 A. D.), and the *Trishthalasetu* of *Narayana-bhatta* attach the highest importance to *Kashi*. The *Tirthasara*

deals with *tirthas* in the Deccan and South India and lauds the *mahatmya* of Setubandha, Pundarika (Pandharpur), Godavari, Krisna-venya, and Narmada. The *Puranas* and the *Mahabharata* have placed various *tirthas* in a hierarchy of merits. Thus, Naimis is the best *tirtha* on the earth and Puskar in the aerial region, while Kurukshetra is the most distinguished in all the three worlds (*Vanaparva*, 82.20). Kuru-kshetra is holy, Sarasvati is holier than Kurukshetra, and Prithudaka is the holier of all *tirthas* (*Vanaparva* 83. 145). The waters of the Sarasvati purify after one bathes for three days, those of Yamuna in seven days, those of the Ganga at once, while the water of the Narmada purifies a man at the mere sight of it (*Matsya Purana*, 186.11). There is no place higher than Varanasi, nor will there be one (*Kurma Purana*, I. 31.64). The reward that is secured by pilgrimage to Varanasi, Kurukshetra, and Narmada can be secured at Dwarka in half a twinkle (*Skanda Purana* 44.4.52). Prayaga is the king of all *tirthas*, and hence the epithet "Prayagaraja."

Four of the most important and holy *tirthas* are located in four corners of the country, namely Badrinath in the north, Puri in the east, Rameshvara in the south, and Dwarka in the west. These are styled *dhama*. Similarly, there is a group of seven sacred cities (*sapta puri*) believed to be the bestower of *moksha*. They are Ayodha, Mathura, Maya (Haridvara), Kashi, Kanchi (or Kanti), Avantika (Ujjain), and Dwarka. There are twelve *jyotirlingas* of Shiva which receive the highest veneration. They are Somanath in Saurashtra, Malikarjuna on Srisaila hill in Kurnool district, Mahakal in Ujjain, Parmesvara in Omkara-kshetra in the Narmada, Kedar in the Himalayas, Bhimshankar in Dakini at the source of the Bhima river near Poona, Visheshvara in Varanasi, Trayambakesvara on the banks of the Gautami (Godavari) near Nasik, Vaidyanath in Chitabhumi, Nagesa in Darukavana, Rameshvara in Setubandha and Ghrishnesa in Shivalaya at the famous site of Elura.

All rivers falling into the sea, and all great mountains and forests have been declared holy, but some of them are especially holy. There are seven seas (*Sindhus*), seven forests, and seven mountains (*Kulaparvatas*) of great merit. The confluence of rivers and springs makes a place especially holy. The "Triveni"

at Prayaga, where the rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and Sarasvati meet together, is endowed with special merit. The Supta-pushkarni at Thid in Kashmir is holy because seven springs unite there. Saptashikunda becomes important because seven *dharas* (fountain) fall there from Himavata.

There are fiftyfive sacred places which are fittest for *sradha* performances. Of these again, Gaya is the most important for sacrifice.

Some *tirthas* have acquired such great importance that others are named after them. There are five Prayagas in the Himalayas, each at the confluence of two rivers: (1) Devaprayaga (confluence of Bhagirathi and Alaknanda), (2) Karnaprayaga (Alaknanda and Pindara), (3) Rudraprayaga (Alaknanda and Mandakini), (4) Nandaprayaga (Alaknanda and Nanda), and (5) Visnuprayaga (Alaknanda and Visnuganga). They are collectively referred to as "Pancha-Prayaga." Similarly, there are five rivers each called Ganga, namely Bhagirathi, Godavari, Krishna, Pinakini (Pennar), and Kaveri. These are known as "Pancha-Ganga."

As in the case of rivers, so in the case of *tirthas*, there lies the importance of *pancha-tirtha*. In Kashi, the five essential *tirthas* are Dashashvamedha, Lolarka, Keshava, Bindumadhava, and Manikarnika. The *Kashikhanda* of the *Skanda Purana* gives another list of the five *tirthas* called *pancha-tirtha*, which every pilgrim to Kashi must visit, namely the confluence of the Asi with the Ganga, Dashashvamedha, Manikarnika, Panchaganga and the confluence of the river Varna (Varuna) with the Ganga. In Puri, the *pancha-tirthas* are the pool of Markandeya, the *Vata* tree (identified with Krishna), Balarama, the sea, and the Indradyumna pool.

There are five Kedaras, namely Kedarnatha, Tunganatha, Rudranatha, Madhyamesvara, and Kalpesvara. Also there are five Badri, namely Vishala-Badri (in Badrinath), Yogadhyana-Badri (in Pandukesvara), Bhavishya-Badri (in Sujnanien), Vriddha-Badri (in Anni *matha*), and Dhyana-Badri (in Urghava). There are five holy *shilas* in Badrinath-kshetra, namely Garuda-shila, Narada-shila, Markandya-shila, Narsingh-shila, Varahi-shila, and Kapal-mochana.

Similarly, there are seven Gangas and seven Godavaris. The rivers included in the list of Sapt-Ganga are Ganga, Godavari, Kaveri, Tamraparni, Sindhu, Saryu, and Narmada. The Sapt-Godavari refers to the seven mouths of the Godavari sacred to seven sages, namely Kasyapa, Atri, Gautama, Bharadvaja, Vishvamitra, Jamadagni, and Vashistha. The Godavari falls into the sea with seven mouths, and hence is very sacred.

To conclude : (a) Although it may not be possible to place all the *tirthas* into a commonly acceptable hierarchical order, the fact that they are of unequal merits and importance cannot be denied; (b) the grading of *tirthas* takes into account the holy places from each region of India; and (c) certain most important holy places are represented by their counterparts in different regions.

Kshetra

In the *Pauranic* description of sacred spots one comes across the concept of *kshetra*. Literally, the word *kshetra*¹⁷ means landed property, field, and enclosed spot of ground, portion of space, place of origin, superficies, circuit, region, seat, sphere of activity, source, extent, womb, wife, seat of the soul, body (regarded as the field of the working of the soul), primeval soul or matter, a house, a town, a plane figure as a triangle. By prefixing it to terms of religious significance its primary meaning has been extended in scriptures to a number of well-developed concepts such as *kshetra-adhidevata* : the tutelary deity of any sacred piece of ground, *kshetra-devata* : the deity of the field, *kshetra-padam* a place sacred to a deity, *kshetra-pal* : a deity protecting fields—an epithet of Shiva, *kshetra-vida* : a sage—one who has spiritual knowledge, *kshetra-raja* : a fifteen year old girl personating Durga at a festival, *kshetra-rashta* : residing at a sacred place, *kshetra-sannyas* : living in retirement at a sacred place under a vow of not to transcend its geographic boundary under any circumstance.

The concept of *buddha-kshetra*¹⁸ (Pali, *khetta*) occurs in several of the Buddhist scriptures. It means Buddha-field, region or (usually) world or world system in which a particular Buddha lives and operates. The 'jewels' of *buddha-kshetra* are Bodhisattvas. There is also the concept of *buddhasunya buddhakshetram* which implies that

the Buddhas are not produced in all Buddha-fields and hence in many there is no Buddha at all. The *buddhakshetra* has been equated with *lokadhatu*, meaning merely 'world system', presumably as potential field for a Buddha, but not necessarily containing one. The *upa-kshetra*, subordinate (Buddha) field, has been stated to be four times the size of a (Buddha) *kshetra* : the implication seems to be that the environs of the *kshetra* constitute the *upa-kshetra*.

According to the *Hevajra Tantra*¹⁹ the *kshetras* are Munmuni, Karunyapataka, Devikota, and Karmarapataka; the *upa-kshetras* are Kulata, Arbuda, Godavari, and Himadri.

All *tirthas* are not *kshetra*. In the Brahmanic scriptures some of the *tirthas* are described as *siddha-kshetra*, the place of supreme attainments. Such are Varanasi-kshetra (also known as Kashikshetra, and Avimuktaka-kshetra, because it is free from *avi-sin* and is never forsaken by Shiva), Kamrup-kshetra, Bhaskara-kshetra or Arka-kshetra, Purshottama-kshetra or Sri-kshetra, Ganga-kshetra, Narayana-kshetra, Gaya-kshetra, and Prayaga-kshetra or Prajapati-kshetra. As embodiments of gods and goddesses there are *mukti-kshetra*—places of salvation. Amongst other *kshetras* are mentioned Ahi-kshetra, Bhrigu-kshetra, Brahma-kshetra, Dharma-kshetra (same as Kuru-kshetra), Druma-kshetra, Gaja-kshetra, Harihar-kshetra, Haya-kshetra, Kedara-kshetra, Nandi-kshetra, Pundarika-kshetra, Sureshvari-kshetra, Varahamula-kshetra or Varah-kshetra, Vastrapatha-kshetra or Ravataka-kshetra, etc. These are *punya-kshetras*—holy places.

All the *kshetras* being the sacred dwellings of the deities included in the four principal Hindu pantheon, these are placed under a four fold broad classification : Brahma-kshetra, Vishnu-kshetra, Shiva-kshetra, and Shakti-kshetra. For example: Kuru-kshetra is Brahma-kshetra, Puri is Vishnu-kshetra, Bhuvaneshwar is Shiva-kshetra, and Jajpur is Parvati-kshetra. According to the *Narsingh Purana*²⁰, there are sixtyeight Vishnu-kshetras, each giving a different epithet to Vishnu. Similarly, there are other gods and goddesses associated with *kshetras* : Kumbhakonam is Ganapati-kshetra²¹, called Svetavighneswara-kshetra; Konaraka is Surya-kshetra; Narmada is Bhrugu-kshetra; in Kashmir Baramula is Varaha-

kshetra; also *Nandi-kshetra* and *Gaja-kshetra*. Some of the *kshetras* are shared by more gods than one of equal importance. *Kashi* is well-known as a *Shiva-kshetra*; it is also a *Vishnu-kshetra*, because here *Vishnu* assumes the epithet of *Keshava*; *Prayaga* is *Prajapati-kshetra*, also *Vishnu-kshetra*; and *Kanchi* is both *Vaishnava* and *Shakta-kshetra*.

Identification of a *kshetra*²² is at times much against the grain, particularly because of the inadequacy of information on ancient geography of India. Many *kshetras* which find mention in the *Puranas* have not yet been located. Sometimes two places claim the same *kshetra* identity. A place called *Devata* on *Tungbhadra*, on the boundary between *Karnataka* and *Maharashtra*, is called *Harihar-kshetra*; the junction of the *Gandaki* with the *Ganga* at *Sonpur*, where "Gajendra-moksha" took place, is also known as *Harihar-kshetra*. *Ahi-kshetra* as a place associated with *Drona* has been identified by some scholars as one in north *Panchala* or *Rohilkhanda* (districts of *Budaon* and *Farukhabad* in western *Uttar Pradesh*); others located it near the *Vindhya*s or the *Narmada*. According to one text *Konarka* is *Bhasakara-kshetra*, another describes *Prayaga* as the *Bhaskara-kshetra*.

Mandala

Larger than *kshetra* is the sacred territory called *mandala* such as *Braja-mandala*, *Okha-mandala*, *Sarasvata-mandala*, *Kashmira-mandala*, *Mahisa-mandala*, *Prayaga-mandala*, and *Viraja-mandala* which extends beyond *Jajpur* on the river *Vaitarni* in *Orissa*. The Tantric Buddhist literature describes the ordering of the *mandala*²³ by means of which a pupil is consecrated. But here *mandala* is inscribed in a spot or in a house as *Tantric* drawings of small size (generally three cubits plus three inches), using the sacred writing colours or powder made from the five gems, or the grains of rice and so on.

Peetha

The term *peetha* has especially been used for some places of pilgrimage, generally associated with the *Shakta* deities. There are *Shakta-peethas*, variously described as 51, 52, 72, or 108 in number, each possessing a mutilated limb of *Sati*, the consort of

Shiva. Among them the most important is Kamakhya. The four cardinal centres of ascetic organization which the Adya Shankaracharya had established in four corners of India, namely Puri in the east, Joshimatha in the north, Dwarka in the west, and Sringeri in the south, are also called *peethas*.

In *Tantrik* Buddhism²⁴, the terms *peetha* and *upa-peetha* have been used. The *peethas* are Jalandhara, Oddiyana, Purangiri, and Kamrupa; the *upa-peethas* are Malava, Sindhu and Nagar. Among the terms for other kinds of sacred territory, which find mention there, are *chandoha* and *pilava*. The *chandohas* are Harikela, arising in the salt ocean, Lampaka, Kanchika, and Saurashtra; the *upa-chandohas* are Kalinga, the Isle of Gold, and Konkana. The *pilavas* comprise that which lies on the village boundary, and that belongs to the city : Caritra, Kosala, Vindhya-kumara-purika. The *upa-pilava* is nearby to that.

According to the Buddhist *Tantra*, the names of the places called *kshetra*, *peethas* and so on, are mentioned for the benefit of simple fools who wander about the country. They are, therefore, interpreted as symbols for the places within the body, that is to say, they are the external equivalent of that which exists within²⁵. The beautiful verse underlying this theme reads as follows²⁶ :

When the mind goes to rest,
The bonds of the body are destroyed,
And when the one flavour of the Innate pours forth,
There is neither outcaste nor brahmin.
Here is the sacred Jamuna and here the river Ganges,
Here are Prayaga and Benaras, here are Sun and Moon.
Here I have visited in my wanderings
shrines and such places of pilgrimage,
For I have not seen another shrine blissful like my own body.

In conclusion, it might be said that the concept of *tirtha* seems to be older than that of the *kshetra*. Possibly the concept of *kshetra* was introduced by the Buddhists in the context of *Tantrika* symbolism; later it was used by the writers of the *Puranas* in planning the sacred territory of a *tirtha* without changing its significance and symbolic structure. Textual evidence may subsequently be sought to modify this contextual speculation.

Structure and Organization

Physiognomy of tirthas

Perhaps there is hardly any beauty spot—a spot with natural scenery, a mountain peak, a river, a streamlet, reservoir of water or waterfall—which is not marked as *tirtha*. The snow-clad mountain peaks such as Kailash and Nanda Devi, the source of a river such as Gangotri and Yamunotri, the confluence of rivers as in Prayaga and of three oceans as in Kanyakumari, and the reservoirs of holy waters such as Pushkara and Martanda are well-known *tirthas*. The hot-spring (*tapta-kunda*) is called *agni-tirtha*. The eternal flame of the natural gas at Jwalamukhi, the snow *lingam* of Shiva at Amarnath, and the sea islands of Remeshwaram and Beta-Dwarka are the examples of natural *tirthas*.

Sacred trees such as *vata*, *pipal*, *kadamba*, *tulsi*, *bilva* and mango are at places worshipped as *upa-tirthas*. Akshya-vata (the imperishable *vata*), also called Kalpadruma, is a *upa-tirtha* under Prayaga, Puri, Gaya, Godavari, and Narmada; Gridhra-vata is a *upa-tirtha* under Gaya; and Siddha-vata under Ujjain. There is also Kushi-vata *tirtha*. In Gujarat, near Bharucha, the holy place of the Kabirpanthis is the Kabir-vata. The goddess Meenakshi at Madurai is called Kadamba-vana-vasini, residing in the forest of Kadamba-trees. The Kadamba-vana was also a favourite sporting ground of Krishna. The shrine of Ekamranath in Kanchi is the place where Shiva is believed to have appeared before Gauri under the mango tree, and hence the mango tree is sacred. Among the

forests marked as *tirthas* are Naimisaranya, Vrindavana, Dandakaranya, Devadaruvana, the twelve *vanas* in Mathura, and the seven holy forests in Kuru-kshetra, namely Kamyaka, Aditivana, Vyasavana, Phalakivana, Suryavana, Madhuvana, and Punyasitavana.

Throughout India, places associated with gods, goddesses, and saints are converted into temple-towns and sacred cities. In South India, temples are characterized by their massive and magnificent structures, imposing *gopuras*, and concentric walled enclosures. In some *tirtha-nagaras*, besides the temples, there may be natural spots such as sacred wells and tanks, lakes, and bathing ghats—all marked as the removers of sins and hence treated as the *upa-tirtha*.

There are also cave temples such as Amarnath in Kashmir, Seeta-gupha in Chitrakoot, and the famous Elura cave.

Anthropomorphization of tirthas

As stated, Prayaga is the king of *tirthas*. The *saptapuri* are the *pataranis* (queens) of Prayagaraja. All *tirthas* propitiate him. One of the popular myths about Prayagaraja runs as follows : On the occasion of the Kumbha the bathers leave their sins at the sacred *sangama*, and hence the white colour of the horse of Prayagaraja turns into black. But then the Tirtharaj goes to Ayodhya, bathes there in the river Saryu to wash away the black sin, and finally returns to his place galloping on the white horse. According to the *Vanaparva* (85.5) the country between the Ganga and the Yamuna is the hips and loins of the mother earth, and Prayaga is the innermost part of the hips. Similarly, Mathura is the horn of the earth, the hump of Madhyadesa.

The sacred rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Narmada, Krishna and Kaveri, in fact all rivers, excepting the Brahmaputra (the son of Brahma), are females. The sacred hills and oceans are males. The Ganga is the mother of all living beings, the Narmada the daughter of the *pitris*. All the holy places in the three worlds come for a bath to the Narmada. Being females all the rivers go through the periods of impurity (*rajodosa*) for three days. The Ganga is however always pure. Under Gaya-kshetra there is a *upa-tirtha* called *yoni-dwara*, the vaginal passage.

The lay-out of the tirthas

The sacred territory of most *tirthas* is well-planned. The *Pauranic* description in respect of at least some of the *kshetras* is complete and graphic, giving such details as total area, location of shrines, and boundaries. Here are a few examples :

The Prayaga-mandala is five *yojanas* in circumference and the moment a man enters inside this strip of land, there is an *ashvamedha* at every step (*Matsya-Purana*, 108. 9-10, 111·8; *Padma-Purana*, I.45 8). Prayaga extends from Pratisthana up to the pool of Vasuki and up to the two *nagas* Kambala and Ashvatara and the Bahumulaka (*Matsya-Purana*, 104·5). Veni or Triveni is within Prayaga, twenty bow-lengths (one bow 4 *hastas* 96 *angulas*) in extent.

The Kashi-kshetra is of two *yojanas* and a half east and west and half a *yojana* broad north and south, out of this Varanasi extends upto the river Asi (*Matsya-Purana*, 184·50-2). The *Padma-Purana* describes the tract covered by a circle, the radius of which is the line-joining Madhyameshvaralinga with the shrine of Dehali Vinayaka. The *Linga-Purana* (92·99-100) makes it a *kshetra* of four *kroshas* in extent in the four directions and also one *yojana*. The *Naradiya-Purana* (48·18-9) says that the *kshetra* extends over two *yojanas* and a half from east to west and is half a *yojana* wide from north to south; god Sambhu declared the extent of the *kshetra* between the rivers Varuna and Asi. In the *Padma-Purana* (14·194-6), Brahma is mentioned to have said to Rudra, 'I have given you a *kshetra* extending to five *kroshas*; when the best of rivers, Ganga, will flow through this *kshetra*, the city will be holy; the Ganga as it flows northwards for two *yojanas* will be holy.' According to Pali texts²⁷, Avimukta Kashi) is that part of the holy place which is represented by a radius of 200 *dhanus* (about 1200 feet) in all four directions from the shrine of Visheshvara. Thus the texts differ on the extent of the Kashi-kshetra, but there is a general agreement that Varanasi is that strip of land, the four boundaries of which are the Ganga to the east, Asi to the south, the shrine of Dehali Vinayaka to the west, and the river Varuna to the north. According to the *Puranas*, the physical appearance of Kashi has been changing. In the Krtya it looked like a trident, in the Treta it

assumed circular form, in the Dvapara it took the form of a chariot, and in the Kali *yuga* it has a conch-like shape. The *Skanda-Purana* devotes one full chapter to Kashi (*Kashi-Khanda*), giving a detailed plan of the *kshetra*. The Kashi-*kshetra* is divided into three segments (*khandas*) called Visheshwara-*khanda*, Kedar-*khanda*, and Omkara-*khanda*, each having a presiding god. The text describes at great length the location of the various shrines which the pilgrims are enjoined to worship and circumambulate. The circumambulation of the inner circuits along the three *khandas* is known as *antargrihi parikrama*. Another circuit which goes round in the radius of five *krosha* (16 km.) marks the boundary of Kashi-*kshetra*. The circumambulation on this circuit is known as *panchakroshi parikrama*.

Such description of the area, location and circumambulation of the shrines can be obtained also in respect of Naimisaranya, Gaya, Kurukshetra, and many other *tirthas*.

Organization of sacred space

The organization of the sacred space of the temple complex in South India²⁸ is as follow: The most sacred spot is the *peetha* or the pedestal for idol. The *peetha* is enshrined in a circular or rectangular or sometimes square shaped *sanctum sanctorum* called *garbha-griha*. The roof of the *garbha-griha* is conical or pyramidal (*shikhara*), crowned by a crest (*stupika*). The *garbha-griha* is encircled by the first *prakara* called *antaramandala*. Small *balipeethas* representing the eight *dikapalas* and the seven *matris* etc. are placed here. A flight of steps called *sopana* connects this *prakara* with the door of the *garbha-griha*. In front of the *sopana* is the main *mandapa*. Round this *mandapa* and *antaramandala* is the second *prakara* called *antahara*, forming a broad verandah with doorways on all the four sides. The *antahara* leads out into an enclosure containing the main *balipeetha*. After the *antahara* we get the third *prakara* called *madhyahara* which is essentially a continuous structure having an array of lamps all round from top to bottom. Beyond this and just outside the main *balipeetha* is the flagstaff (*dhvajastambha*). The fourth *prakara* called *bahyahara* is beyond this. It forms the pathway for the processions within the temple. The fifth and last *prakara* is the outermost

wall of the temple. This is called *maryada*. The main entrance is through a *gopura* which may be an ordinary door-way with small roofing or one with a superstructure comprising rooms and verandah. The space between the *garbha-griha* and *antahara* is roofless; so also is most of the space between the *madhyahara* and *maryada*.

Thus the comparative holiness of space in South India temple complex terminates at the outermost wall called *maryada* (limit).

In the North Indian *Pauranic* organization of sacred space there is no such artificial limit. The holiest spot is the *garbha-griha*, and then in the descending order are the *prakara*, the *upa-tirtha*, the *khanda*, the main *tirtha*, the *kshetra*, the *mandala*, and or the *desh*.

To instance the above illustration : In Utkala *desh* (ancient name of Orissa) there are four *kshetras*²⁹, namely Yajpur or Jajpur as *Parvati-kshetra* (also *Gada-kshetra*), Konarka as *Surya-kshetra* (also *Padma-kshetra*), Bhuvaneshvara as *Hara-kshetra*, and Puri as *Purushottama-kshetra* (also *Sri-kshetra* and *Sankha-kshetra*). Under the Kashmir-mandala there are several *kshetras* such as *Nandi-kshetra* and *Sureshvari kshetra*; of these the *Sureshvari-kshetra* enshrines a sacred spring known as the *Gupta-Ganga tirtha*. The *Kashi-kshetra* extends over two *yojanas* and a half from east to west and is half a *yojana* wide from north to south; out of this the *Varanasi tirtha* extend upto the river Asi; the *kshetra* is further divided into three *khandas*, each containing a number of *upa-tirthas*. The *Gaya-kshetra* is five *kroshas* in extent, *Gaya tirtha* is two *kroshas* and a half, and *Gayasiras* (*Phalgu upa tirtha*) is only one *krosha*. Similar distinction between *Prayaga-kshetra*, *Prayaga*, and *Triveni* is made in the *Pauranic* description of these places.

The circumambulation on the seven holy circuits, namely the *garbha-griha*, the *prakara*, the *antaragriha* (*khanda parikrama*), the *kshetra* (*panchakroshi parikrama*), the *mandala* (*chaurasi-kroshi parikrama*) the *charodhama*, and the *saptapuri* makes the whole of India sacred. The pilgrim's recitation at every ritual that he is making a sacred performance in such and such *tirtha* under such and such *kshetra* located in the *Jamboo dwipe-Bharata khande* is indeed the revelation of this concept of sacred India and a constant reminder that this should be treated so.

Organization of tirtha functionaries

The Brahmin priests officiating at the rites performed in a *tirtha* call themselves *Tirtha-purohita*—the priest of the *tirtha*. Since they accept donations and endowments at a *tirtha*, in defiance of the *shastric* injunction, they are relegated to a lower position. There are various types of priests engaged in pilgrim services as pilgrim-guides and ritual associates. In Kashi, they are of the following types⁸⁰ : the *Tirtha-purohitas*, who receive the pilgrims at their residence and assist them in sacred performances; the *Karmakandis*, who are competent priests for Vedic sacrifices; the *Ghatias* or the *Ganga-putras* (sons of the river *Ganga*), who assist the pilgrims in sacred performances at the ghats; the *Bhaddars*, who escort the pilgrims from the railway station; and the *Yatrawals*, who guide and assist the pilgrims visiting temples. All these categories of priests and guides are popularly known as *Panda*. The priest of a temple, as distinguished from the priest engaged in pilgrim service, is called *Pujari*. The *Mahapatras* are those who officiate at the *sraddha* ritual. Among the ritual associates are the barbers, the musicians, the florists, the boatmen, and the *Doms*—the custodians of the sacred fire used in cremation.

Among the priests and guides of this kind we may mention the following⁸¹ : the *Sewayats* of Puri; the *Pandas* of Deoghar, *Gaya*, *Prayaga*, *Mathura*, *Badrinath*, *Kedarnath* and *Hardwara*; the *Divas* connected with the *Vallabhachari* shrines of western India; the *Sevakas* of *Pushakara*; the *Moylars* connected with the *Madhva* temples of *Tulu*-speaking region; the *Number of Karnataka*; the *Tantris* and the *Ambalavasis* connected with the shrines of *Malabar*; the *Dikshattars* of *Chidambaram*; the *Gurukkals* and *Bhattaras* of *Tamil Nadu*; the *Embrans* of south *Kanara*; the *Shivadhvajas*, the *Shivanambis*, and the *Tamball Shaivite priests of Karnataka*; the *Vaikhanasal Archaks* of *Andhra Pradesh*; the *Barna Brahmins* of North India; the *Agradani* of Bengal; the *Acharya* of western India; and the *Dakot* or *Sanichara Brahmins* of *Rajasthan* who accept gifts of oil and sesame for propitiating the planet *Saturn*.

In South India, the contingent of temple functionaries⁸² is large and complex. They are classed on the basis of such minute

specialization in temple services as temple guards, sweeping the floor of the temple, decoration of the deity, preparing sandalwood paste, making wreath-ornament for the deity, the waving of lamps, worship and *abhiseka*, music and dance, recitation of the *Vedas*, cooking, offering food to the deity, and distribution of *prasada*, etc. The temple has its own potters, basket-makers, tailors, gardeners, carriers, and varieties of servants and specialists required in the organization of temple estate. Unlike the practice in the North, here there is no organization of pilgrim-services. Those who are associated with temples may also guide the pilgrims, but there is no separate category like the North Indian Pandas, Bhaddars and Yatrawals who are exclusively devoted to pilgrim services, though unrelated to the temple organization.

Devadasis

Music and dance form a part of worship and ritual, mostly in Shiva and Vishnu temples all over India. But the institution of Basavis and Devadasis or handmaids of the gods, is peculiar to South India. The girls are dedicated to the temple in early childhood; they are married to the god, not men. The priests train them in the art of dancing and singing, and their main duty is to dance and sing before the idols. In course of time the institution of Devadasis lost its grace and original purpose. Most Devadasis have now turned into prostitutes, and their sacred quarter crowding the *tirthas* are converted into brothels.

The tradition of music and dance in temples, however, continues. The *tirthas* associated with Krishna are the homes of Rasa-lila and various dances similar to it—all reminding of the loves of Krishna and the Gopis. In Gujarat the *garba* dance is performed in honour of the goddess Durga, particularly during the Navaratra festival. It is on record that at the time of the plunder of Somnath temple by Mahmud of Ghazni three hundred barbers used to shave the pilgrims and three hundred and fifty dancing girls were at the service of the temple.

To sum up : the structure of the *tirthas* is built on the foundation of a wider concept which sustains the interest of the common people. The sacred space has been organized imaginatively, and a

large contingent of specialists has been disposed towards pilgrim-services and the up-keep of the *tirthas* and the temple complexes. Because of efficient organization, the *tirthas* have held a powerful attraction not only for spiritual benefits but also for material gains. It is through the network of *tirthas* that a united India has been conceived. And it is indeed the institution of *tirtha* which binds the people perpetually across the heterogeneous cultural geography of India.

Elaborate rules⁸⁸ regarding the eligibility (*adhikara*) for pilgrimage and the procedures to be observed by pilgrims have been laid down in the *Puranas* and the *Nibandhas*. Persons of all the four *varnas* and *ashramas*, both men and women, and a householder with his wife are allowed to undertake pilgrimage. Before starting on a pilgrimage one should keep fast, offer worship to Ganesh and the *pitrīs*, honour good Brahmins, and then make a resolve (*sankalpa*) to go on pilgrimage. The pilgrim should wear *karpatika* apparel, namely a copper-ring, a copper-bracelet, and a red robe. He should avoid making use of a conveyance drawn by men or bulls, or a chariot which is drawn by mules or horses, but he may use a boat to reach holy places like **Gangasagara** which cannot be reached otherwise. It has been provided that one should always go on a sacred journey wearing shoes and holding an umbrella in the rains or in summer and also armed with a staff at night or in a forest. Tonsure and fast are acts that must be done at all *tirthas* except, according to some authorities, at **Kuru-kshetra**, **Visala** (**Ujjaini** or **Badrika**), **Viraja** (river in **Orissa**), and **Gaya**.

It may be mentioned here that the older rules of pilgrimage were comparatively simple, providing alternatives, but the later authorities made every ritual more elaborate and harder.

On reaching a *tirtha* the pilgrim is required to perform a number of rituals which may vary according to personal needs and

prescribed customs of the place. Without going into the details of the modes of performances a few quaint and uncommon rituals associated with some *tirthas* may be recorded here.

Circumambulation

The clockwise circumambulation of a holy place or of several *tirthas* is believed to have the effects of a horse-sacrifice (*ashvamedha*). One of the most meritorious performances at Kashi is the *panchakroshi* pilgrimage—circumambulation of the holy *kshetra* with a radius of five *kroshas*. The 80 km. *panchakroshi* road is journeyed in six days, visiting hundreds of shrines on foot. The pilgrims start from the Manikarnika and keeping to their right along the bank of the Ganga river cross the confluence of the dry river Asi and halt at the shrine of Kandava at a distance of about 8 km. from the Manikarnika. The second halt is at Dhoopachandi, the third at Ramesvara, the fourth at Shivapur, the fifth at Kapildhara, and on the sixth day they move from Kapiladhara to Varuna-sangam and thence to Manikarnika again. From there the pilgrims go to the temple of *Sakshi-Vinayaka* who is supposed to bear witness to this pilgrimage. The circumambulation of the three inner segments of Kashi, called *antaragrihi parikrama*, is equally meritorious. The ten-day circumambulation of *Prayaga mandala* is called *vahiravedi parikrama*, and the two-day circumambulation of its inner circuit is called *antaravedi parikrama*. The *tirthas* like Naimisarnya, Janakpur, Ayodhya, Chitrakoot, Mathura-Vindravana, Puri, Gaya, Girnar, Narmada etc. have similar tradition of holy circumambulation.

There are also larger circuits of pilgrimage. The *chaursikroshi parikrama* takes place in the radius of eightyfour *krosha* (267 km.) from Kashi, and finally there is the circumambulation of *charodhama* and *sapta-puri* which completes the circuit of pilgrimage in India.

Going on a triangular pilgrimage is called *trikona-yatra*. In Vindhya-chal, the nine km. *trikona-yatra* is endowed with special merit. Throughout India there is a universal practice of *pradakshina*—going round the idol of the deity, the *garbha-griha*, the *antaramandala*, and even the outermost wall of the temple precinct.

Kshetra-sannyasa

In the somewhat grotesque imagery of the *Puranas*, a pilgrim to Kashi is recommended to break his legs on a stone, so that they may not run away with him from the holy city. The central idea is to live in Kashi till death. As stated, the vow to dwell within the sacred territory of a *tirtha* till death is called *kshetra-sannyasa*. The person who has taken this vow must not cross the boundaries of the *tirtha* even for religious purposes. A *kshetra-sannyasi* in Kashi is interdicted from undertaking the *panchakroshi* circumambulation. His salvation is already secured, and no further pilgrimage is required.

In Kashi, people from all over India come with the expressed purpose of leading religious life and to die in the holy city. They may not follow the rules of *kshetra-sannyasa*, and yet their salvation is guaranteed. It is mostly the old and the widows who come here for what is called *Kashi-vasa*—living in Kashi permanently with religious motive.

Garbha-vasa

To dwell in a *tirtha* for nine months with a vow not to cross its sacred territory is called *garbha-vasa*. Living in a holy place for nine months is like living in the mother's womb (*garbha*), and hence this duration of pilgrimage is called *garbha-vasa*. The one who has performed this efficacious rite is freed from the cycle of rebirth.

Kalpa-vasa

Staying in a *tirtha*, usually on the bank of a holy river, for one month is called *kalpa-vasa*. In Prayaga, bathing at the *sangama* for the whole month of Magha is endowed with inexhaustible merits. It is said that even three days bath at the *sangama* is equal to the gift of three crores of cows.

Austerities

Fasting, sexual continence, abstinence from unguents, soft-bed and luxuries, rejection of the aid of vehicles or animals for

making journey, and walking without shoes in *tirthas* are some of the practices enjoined on the pilgrims.

Measuring of the length of the pilgrim's body by successive prostrations on the ground as he journeys to the sacred place is one of the most difficult performances. This is called *dandapranama*.

The holy bath

The holy bath is an essential purificatory rite for all kinds of sacred performances. It may also be performed independently as a ritual complete in itself. A holy bath in the Ganga secures metits—purifies and frees from sins at once, and yields heaven and *moksha*. By bathing in the Ganga and drinking its water one purifies one's family up to the seventh ancestor.

Bathing in holy rivers is always meritorious. But on some occasions, usually connected with astronomical conjunctions, every river and tank gains the virtue of the Ganga, and the Ganga and other all-time holy rivers must, therefore, be much more efficacious than usual. One such occasion is known as *ardhodaya*. It occurs when in the month of Magha or Pausa, a new-moon falls on Sunday, and the rising constellation is *shrawana* (during day time) and the *yoga* is *vyatipata*. Eclipses of the sun and the moon are similar occasions when a miraculous transformation of the nature of waters takes place.

Another combination which requires the conjunction of the planet Jupiter with other planets has been shown in Table I. It happens only once in twelve years at four places, namely Hardwara, Prayaga, Ujjain, and Nasik. The occasion is called *kumbha*. Six years before and after each *kumbha* comes *ardha-kumbha*. The *ardha-kumbha* takes place only at Hardwara and Prayaga. The occasion of *kumbha* attracts immense numbers of bathers from all parts of India. It is, however, considered as the festival of ascetics, because on this occasion the naked ascetics (*Naga sannyasis*) have preference in the priority of bathing at the holy spot.

TABLE I. The occurrence of Kumbha.

| Place | Month | Position of planets |
|----------|------------------|------------------------------------|
| Hardwara | March-April | Jupiter x Aquarius |
| Prayaga | December-January | Jupiter x Aries Sun x Capricorn |
| Nasik | July-September | Jupiter x Leo |
| Ujjain | May-June | Jupiter x Leo |

Religious suicide

Suicide has generally been condemned by the authorities on *Dharmasastras*, but some exceptions to this are made in the following cases⁸⁴ : (a) by those guilty of *mahapatakas* (namely Brahmin murder, drinking of *sura*, theft of Brahmin's gold, and incest); (b) by a forest hermit suffering from incurable diseases and unable to perform the duties of his order; (c) by an old man or one who cannot observe the rules of bodily purification or who is so ill as to be beyond medical skill; (d) by a householder if his life's work is done, if he has no desire for the pleasures of the world and does not desire to live, or if he is a Vedantin and convinced of the ephemeral nature of life; (e) by a wife dying by *sahagamana* or *anumarana*; and (f) by religious suicide at some *tirthas*.

Religious suicide is allowed at Prayaga, Gangasagara, Purusottama-kshetra, Kashi, Prthudaka, Srisaila, at the confluence of Narmada and Kaveri, and also at Amarkantaka.

Following are the meritorious modes of suicide : (1) starving; (2) covering oneself with dry cowdung cakes and setting it on fire and consuming oneself therein; (3) burying oneself in snow; (4) to plunge into water at the *sangam*, enumerate one's sins and pray till alligators come and devour the man; (5) hanging with head down in the stream and feet up and drinking the waters of the Ganga; (6) cut one's own throat, or cutting off one's own flesh and giving it as food to birds; and (7) by falling head-long from a cliff, at Amarkantaka, for instance.

Religious suicide was considered as one of the approved and undoubted means of securing *moksha*, heaven and similar reward. But gradually this became one of the forbidden acts of Kali-age, or what is called *kalivarjya*. Some of the later medieval writers, however, upheld this practice with some reservation. For instance, Narayanabhatta (born in 1513 A D) writes (about 1580 A. D.) in his great scholarly work *Trishthalisetu* that one may resort to suicide at Prayaga for the attainment of *moksha*, but no one has authority to do so after abandoning to their fate one's old parents, young wife and children that require support, nor should a woman who is pregnant or who has young children or who has no permission from her husband.

Animal-sacrifice

The sacrificing of animals constituted an important item of Vedic ritual. The greatest of the Vedic sacrifice was the horse-sacrifice. Animal-sacrifice (*pasu-yaga*) prevailed in Vedic times, and even cow-sacrifice (*gomedha* or *gosava*) is prescribed in the Vedas. The sacrifice of the spit-ox (*sula-gava*) for propitiating Rudra and averting plague in cattle was also performed. Now the cow-sacrifice is a prohibited practice, *kalivarjya*. The horse-sacrifice was performed even in medieval times. And in *tirthas* like Varanasi, Gaya, Ganga, Godavari, Narmada, Prayaga, Mathura, and Kuru-kshetra the sacred spot where ten horses were once sacrificed is identified today, each having *Dasashvamedha* as a *upa-tirtha*.

The sacrifice (*bali*) of goats, sheep, and buffalos is essential for the propitiation of **Shakta** deities. It is widely prevalent in the *tirthas* of eastern India such as Kainakhy and Kalighat. The number of victims sacrificed and the flow of blood on each day, particularly on a ceremonial day, make the *tirtha* more terrifying than pleasant. There are elaborate rituals of slaughtering the consecrated animal. The flesh of the sacrificial animal is eaten as *mahaprasada*, and even the vegetarian devotees wear the holy mark of the sacrificial blood.

Some non-Brahmanic deities are propitiated best by bloody sacrifice of pigs, fowl, and pigeons.

The killing of the sacrificial animal is prohibited at the *tirthas* under strong Vaishnava influence. In such places, after performing a symbolic sacrifice, the animal is let loose to wander at will. One may also cut a *kalabash* fruit imagining it to be a buffalo, or break coconuts in lieu of bloody sacrifice. It may be noted here that the breaking of coconuts, as ritual offering to gods and goddesses, is widely prevalent in places where animal sacrifice is prohibited. The offering of the effigy of a horse made of clay or of cloth is a popular ritual at the non-Brahmanic shrines in different parts of India, particularly in western India.

Animal-worship

Consecrated bulls, cows, and monkeys are fed and worshipped at all *tirthas* sacred to Shiva and Vishnu. In the *tirthas* associated with death rituals, one of the most important ceremonies is the Vrishotasarga. The ceremony takes place on the full-moon day in Kartika or Asvin. A dark coloured bull with all auspicious marks is brought, and the blacksmith brands the bull, on one flank with a discus and on the other flank with a trident. The bull is then washed and decked; four young cows are brought to him as his beloved to roam about sportingly. The bull is thus let loose in the *tirtha* and worshipped by the pilgrims as Nandi—the vehicle of Shiva. It is because of this practice that Kashi gives a look of a pastoral city. Most *tirthas* associated with Rama and Krishna such as Ayodhya, Chitrakoot, and Vrindavana are the cities of monkeys—the tribesmen of Hanuman who was the ardent devotee of Rama. In places like Hardwara, Martanda, Vrindavana, and Ayodhya one of the common sacred performances is to offer food to fish and tortoise living in the holy waters. The places sacred to Krishna are the abodes of holy cows, peacocks and pigeons. In Deshanoka, a holy place near Bikaner, there is a temple of Karnijee, the family deity of the Rathors, where rats are reared and goats sacrificed. There are countless rats, called the *kabe* of Karnijee; they are propitiated by offering sweets.

The worship of serpent is widely prevalent in India. In the Kashmir valley, Anantanaga is the *tirtha* sacred to the king of the

serpent gods Ananta. On the way to Kedarnath, there is a holy place called Garuda-chatti which is associated with Garuda—mythical combination of the bird Garuda and man—the vehicle of Vishnu. There is also a Hansa *tirtha* in the Himalayas, sacred to the goose—the charger of Brahma. The Kapota *tirtha* under Godavari, Kapotaka *tirtha* under Sabbramati, and Kapotesvara under Sri-parvata are associated with the pigeon.

Tonsure of women

The authorities are divided in their opinion on the religious necessity of tonsure of women⁹⁵ in holy places. According to one view only widows have to tonsure their heads, and the woman whose husband is living may cut only two or three finger breadths of her tresses. The other view is that women should not tonsure their head at any *tirtha* except at Prayaga, and there too only after obtaining the permission of their husbands. Tirupati is another *tirtha* where the complete tonsure of the head for both men and women is a common practice.

Pinda-dana

The offering of *pindas* (propitiatory rites to the manes) at holy places is an obligatory ritual. There are fifty-five *tirthas* (according to some 168) meritorious for performing the rites of *sraddha*. They are called *pitri-tirthas*. Of these, Gaya is the most important *pitri-tirtha* and Ganga the *pitri-nadi* where the fruit of offerings made is inexhaustible. In Gaya it is obligatory for a man to offer *pinda* to his ancestors to save them from hell, and even to himself but without sesame. An ascetic (*sannyasi*) should not offer *pindas* but should merely exhibit (hold up) his staff and should put it down on Vishnu-pada at Gaya. There are elaborate rules and modes of performing *sraddha* :

At Gaya, one may offer (to *pitris*) *pindas* by means of *payasa* (rice cooked in milk), boiled rice, barley flour, fruits and roots, the cake of sesame (after oil is extracted), sweet-meats or jaggery with *ghee* or with curds alone or with invigorating honey. In a *sraddha* at Gaya, the procedure

consists in preparing a seat for the *pindas*, the offering of *pindas*, the sprinkling of water again (on the *kusa* grass), giving fees and declaration of dinner (to Brahmins); but there is no invocation of *pitrīs*, no curtains of privacy and no blemish due to *sraddha* being seen³⁰ (by undesirable persons or animals).

It is believed that Gaya is the appropriate *tirtha* for performing *sraddha* in respect of male ancestors; for the female ancestors Siddhapur in north Gujarat is the fit place, and hence it is called *matri-Gaya*.

Miscellaneous tirtha practices

Holy bath, vows, prayer, worship, waving of *arti* (lamp), gift, *godana* (gifting of cow), *tarpana* (water oblation to *pitrīs*), and *prayaschita* (penance and ritual purification) are recommended for performances at every *tirtha*. Several other performances which pilgrims are supposed to make according to the commended practice of a *tirtha*, may briefly be recorded as follows :

Ceremonial throwing of milk, flowers, coconuts, fruits, betel-leaves, betel-nuts, and coins into holy rivers is considered meritorious.

Throwing the bones which remain after cremation into holy rivers is specially recommended for conferring *moksha* on the dead. This is called *asthi-viserjana*.

Sweeping the streets of Kashi is a meritorious act.

Branding the pilgrim's body with a red-hot metal stamp containing the impressions of discus and conch of Vishnu is enjoined at Dwarka. This is called *dama* or *chhapa*.

Kashi is called *mahashashana*—the great cremation ground. The cremation at this place secures *moksha*. Hence the dead bodies and the dying persons from far-off places are hurriedly brought to Kashi for cremation at the Manikarnika. This is called the pilgrimage of the dead and the dying.

One of the peculiar features of the Purushottama *tirtha*³¹ at Puri is that in the court of the Jagannatha and outside the Lion

Gate no distinction of caste is observed. The second special feature is that the holy rice cooked as offering to Jagannath is regarded as so sanctified that all barriers of caste are transcended. A Puri priest will receive the holy food even from a low caste Hindu. The feeling is that cooked rice when once placed before Jagannath never ceases to be pure. Hence the *maha-prasada* is dried and taken to all parts of India. At the periodical *sraddha* among Vaishnavas a grain of this holy rice is invariably put on the cake as the most sacred article that can be offered to the manes. Such exceptional treatment of *prasada* (sharing the holy food by Chandala and Brahmin without making any distinction of pure-impure) can be seen also at Bhuvaneshvara and Badrinath.

The offerings of food and drink of various kinds are made according to the specific requirements of gods and goddesses : Shiva is propitiated best by the water from the river Ganga, milk, honey and *bhang* (*cannabis saliva*); the Shakta deities are pleased by flesh and wine. The god Saturn is offered salt and oil; the Vaishnava deities are fond of sweets and clarified butter. One of the essential offerings at the great shrine of Badrinath is horse-gram.

Among various other articles of offerings, we may list pieces of cloth, flags, tri-colour (red-yellow-white) or black threads, vermillion, sandalwood paste, incense, *durba* grass, and flowers. The effigy of an umbrella or a crown made of silver or gold (called *chhatra*) is offered usually to a female deity. In eastern India the female deities are sometimes offered a basket-like pendant structure made of reeds. The pilgrims from Puri and Dwarka return home with cane-sticks. The offering of cane-sticks to gods is peculiar to the shrines associated with the cult of Krishna. The conch-shells are also offered at the Vaishnava shrines.

Pilgrimage is considered efficacious in the fulfilment of the three cardinal desires : *putreshana* (desire for son), *vitteshana* (desire for wealth), and *lokeshana* (desire for worldly gains). Some of the *tirthas* are specially approachable for removing barrenness or for having male child. The *linga* at Baidyanath-dhama is called *manokamana-linga* which can be propitiated for the fulfilment of all desires, including the desire to have a child. The woman desirous of an offspring takes a bath in the Shiva-Ganga tank, usually with her hus-

band, and then they lie down on the verandah performing a fast for three days and three nights. This is called *dharna* or *kusothar*. During this time the grace of the god is indicated to her or the husband in a dream. Following this the woman marks the wall of the temple with red impression by both her hands upside down. This is called *chhapa*. When the desire is fulfilled, she comes back to make another impression of her hands, but this time in upright direction. She also erects a flag-staff and fastens the spire of the temple of Shiva and Parvati with a long coloured thread.

Another peculiar practice at this holy shrine of the Lord Baidyanath is reported as follows. A person in need of money observes *dharna*, and on the third night a leaf of *pipal* tree is left in the temple. The following morning when the temple gates are opened, the priest finds the order of the Lord written there and addressed to some rich man for payment of the sum in favour of the person who is praying. The priest copies this on a piece of paper and hands over to the person who has prayed for it. This is known as the *hundi* of Baba Baidyanath. The man upon whom this *hundi* or cheque is drawn dares not to disobey.

The *dharna* is performed also for the cure of diseases. Baidyanath is also the Lord of medicine, and hence persons suffering from chronic diseases make special pilgrimage to this place. Several other *tirthas* are famous for curing disease. The believers are said to be cured of leprosy by the grace of Adi-Gadadhara Vishnu at Gaya, by a holy bath in the hot-spring at Rajgir, and by propitiating the Sun god at Konarak.

Sexual intercourse at a *tirtha* is prohibited. But on the bank of the river Jeebachha in north Bihar there is a festival of "child-bearing" when, after taking a holy bath, the couples cohabit right there with a view to increasing fertility.

Festivals

In every *tirtha*, the *mahotsava* (ceremonies and festivals) associated with the deities of the place are observed periodically. These attract pilgrims from far-off places in large numbers. A *tirtha* may be observing some of the festivals in common with the other *tirthas* but may also be having its own special feature. The birth or marri-

age anniversary of gods and goddesses is celebrated at many *tirthas*. The Ramnavami at Ayodhya, the Vivaha-panchami at Janakpur, the Krishna-janmastami at Mathura and Dwarka, the Shivaratri and the Annakoota at Kashi, and the Dasahera at Kalighat and Kamakhya are special occasions of pilgrimage. The colourful ceremony of Jhoolan, in which the idol swings for a number of days, is common with the shrines associated with Krishna. The ceremony of carrying out the idol round the *tirtha* in a palanquin, accompanied by music and procession, is a usual sight at the *tirthas* in South India.

The festival of taking round the deity in a wooden car, drawn by male and female devotees, is also one of the most celebrated events at some *tirthas*. In Puri the festival called Ratha-yatra³⁸ starts on the 2nd day of the bright half of Asadha. The car of Jagannatha is about 45 feet in height, 35 feet square, and is supported on 16 wheels of 7 feet diameter with 16 spokes in each and has Garuda as a crest; the second car is that of Subhadra, which is a little smaller than Jaganntha's car, resting on 12 wheels with 12 spokes in each and having a *padma* (lotus) as the crest; the third car is that of Balarama resting on 14 wheels with 14 spokes in each wheel and has Hanuman for crest. The cars are drawn by pilgrims and hired labourers from the temple to the country house of Jagannatha (which is about two miles away) amidst the shouts and emotional songs of thousands of pilgrims. On the 10th day of the bright half begins the returns of the car from the country house. This is the most important festival of Puri considered as the special feature of Jagannath. Elsewhere also, particularly in South India, the car-festival is of significance, yielding great merit.

The constraints of space will not permit even a brief account of the major sacred performances, and hence this exploratory venture to glance at the grand-sweep of the history of *tirtha* practices must end here and now with the following observations : The sacred performances are many and various. The diversities of performances both in time and in space offer a wide range of choice to people of diverse cultures. The obligatory performances such as *pindadana* and *parikrama*, promote a strong cultural linkage between the regions and the people of India.

Diversities in Traditions

Clearly the purpose of this essay is served if the foregoing pages have conveyed an impression of the vastness and complexity of the subject, and the following pages illustrate the feasibility and importance of analysing the cultural diversities of *tirthas*, which the anthropologists of religion have so far neglected. In concluding the traditions of *tirthas*, we shall, therefore, look briefly at several different levels of diversities.

Diversity of categories

As stated, there are various textual categories of holy places created by the diversity of conceptions. First, there is the geographical category based on the natural form of a *tirtha* such as *sagar* (sea), *dwipa* (island), *nadi* (river), *kunda* (wells), *sarovara* and *pushkara* (lakes and tanks), *dhara* (fountains), *agni-kunda* (hot-spring), *parvata* (hills), *aranya* (forests), and *puri* (towns).

The second category is formed on the basis of territorial limits. The *mandala*, the *kshetra*, the *tirtha*, the *khanda*, and the *upa-tirtha* are distinguishable in extent, each subsequent one being smaller and holier than each preceding one.

The third category relates to the functional aspect of holy places. Thus there are *siddha-kshetra*, *mukti-kshetra*, *pitri-tirtha* and even *pasu-tirtha* like Kolyata where animals after succumbing to death attain salvation.

The fourth category of holy places is formed on the basis of their association with the principal gods and goddesses. There are *Vishnu-kshetra*, *Shiva-kshetra*, *Surya-kshetra*, *Brahma-kshetra*, *Parvati-kshetra*, *Ganapaty-kshetra*, and the like.

The fifth category denotes their origin, and hence all the holy places are placed under four-fold division, namely *daiva*, *asura*, *arsa* and *manusa*.

The sixth category makes a trichotomic division of *tirthas* into *jangam*, *sthavara* and *manas*.

The seventh category puts a number of *tirthas* into special classes such as the *chatur-dhama*, the *saptapuri*, the *peetha*, and the *jyotirlinga*.

Diversity of performances

The diversity of sacred performances is created by the variety of contexts and the diversity of cultures. There are various contexts such as *samskaric* (associated with life-crises), *parmarthic* (spiritual), and *vyavaharic* (worldly practical needs, desires—*vitteshana*, *putreshana*, and *lokeshana*). In each of these contexts there are varieties of performances, and the modes, objects, and offerings of each performance may vary according to textual prescription and oral tradition. In respect of the scrupulous details of a performance there may be individual, caste, sect, and cultural variations.

Such variations in the performances may occur in a single sacred spot, or in a cluster of sacred spots, or in a large segment, or in the sacred zone of a *tirtha* containing numerous *upa-tirthas*. A detailed description of the varieties of traditions in sacred performances at a major intra-*tirtha* level has been attempted elsewhere⁸⁹. A similar attempt may be made to work out the nature and the range of variation at the inter-*tirtha* level. Such a venture will, of course, have to wait for the data from different *tirthas* in a systematized form.

Diversity of the performers

The diversity as reflected in different levels of cultures of the performers provides at once a wider and deeper understanding of

the tradition of *tirthas* as also of the civilization which has made them what they are. This point has been illustrated elsewhere¹⁰ comprehensibly; here the basis of its conceptual formulation may be referred to briefly.

An empirical study of Kashi shows that all the pilgrims visiting the holy city do not participate in its sacred complex equally. The extent of participation depends largely on the pilgrims' cultural knowledge of a *tirtha* and of the textual prescriptions regarding the rituals to be performed there. Hence the participation of the pilgrims belonging to Oral, Textual, and Transcendental Cultural Traditions (in the *tirthas* embodying varieties of Brahmanic and non-Brahmanic sacred traditions) will be necessarily unequal. Thus, a potter pilgrim belonging to the Oral Cultural Tradition feels satisfied if a Brahmin priest takes him to the shrine of Vishwanath in Kashi for worship and to the river Ganga for holy bath. The priest may take him to some other Brahmanic shrines, but that does not form an essential part of his pilgrimage. What is really important for him and what he does on his own is to visit the non-Brahmanic shrine such as Agiyabir where he is himself competent to perform such rites as to cure himself from a chronic disease he may be suffering from, or to have an offspring. His participation in Brahmanic sacred complex of Kashi is only minimal and peripheral. Where he interacts more freely and closely are the places which have no scriptural sanction and which lie outside the sacred geography of Brahmanic Kashi. The Brahmin pilgrim belonging to the Textual Cultural Tradition, on the other hand, tries to visit all the sacred shrines and to perform all the rituals enjoined by the *shastras* to the best of his means. But a Dandi *sannyasi* belonging to the Transcendental Cultural Tradition may or may not perform any ritual in Kashi. Since he is an Advaitin he is not supposed to believe in gods and goddesses, and hence his visit to a temple is not only unnecessary but also inconsistent with his spiritual ideals. At the time of taking *sannyasa* he had performed his own funeral rite which symbolizes his "death" as an individual in this world, and, therefore, he is no longer required to be guided by "this worldly" laws. To him ideally there is no distinction between what people call "sacred" and "profane". His visit to a place of pilgrimage

may therefore be casual or motivated by personal reasons. Ideally his participation in the pilgrimage, in the sense of ritual performances, is practically nill.

Thus, the three persons belonging to three different cultural traditions interact with a *tirtha* differently and in unequal extent.

Diversity of regional cultures

The diversity of *tirthas* derives from the diversity of regional cultures. The Indian sub-continent is well-known for its geographic, racial and linguistic diversities. Different regions of India have evolved distinct cultures⁴¹ in respect of the material art of life as also of the finer forms of culture, namely art and architecture, dance and music. Even in classical culture and the Brahmanic social and ritual organization⁴² this kind of regionality emerges prominently. Here are a few examples of regionality in the organization of sacred traditions.

On the basis of temple types, India may be roughly marked into two parts, the North and the South. The local specialization further marks of western and central India from eastern India, and the Tamil-speaking area from Karnataka, Andhra and Orissa. The gigantic construction and imposing *gopuras* which mark the temples in other parts of South India are conspicuous by their absence in Kerala.

Each large region has only one or two favourite gods. From central Uttar Pradesh to Bihar, Rama is the idol of the people; in western India it is Krishna who commands popularity. Maharashtra and Karnataka commonly worship Vithoba. Parthasarthi is adored in Tamil Nadu, while Narsingh has many devotees in Andhra Pradesh. Each region has one or two important regional shrines. Guravayura and Padmanabha temples in Kerala; Madurai and Srirangam in Tamil Nadu; Chamundesvari and Udupi in Karnataka; Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh; Pandharpur in Maharashtra; Shanta Durga and Mangesh in Goa; Ambika or Avasur and Dakora in Gujarat; Nathadwara in Rajasthan; Vaishnava Devi in Jammu; Jalandhara in Punjab; Ksheera Bhavani, Martanda, and Anantanaga in Kashmir; Jwalamukhi, Mandi and Chamba in

Himachal Pradesh; Hardwara in western Uttar Pradesh; Vindhya-chal in eastern Uttar Pradesh; Baidyanathdhama in Bihar; Bhubaneshwar in Orissa; Tarkeshvara and Kalighat in Bengal; and Kamaroopa-Kamakhya in Assam.

The modes of sacred performances have considerable regional variations. If eastern India follows the *Tantrika* mode of worship, the other parts of India practise the *Vaidika* form. Kerala⁴³ has evolved a system which combines the *Vaidika* and the *Tantrika* modes, and, therefore, Kerala *Tantra* is looked upon as a distinct *prasthana* in itself.

Every region observes distinctive religious and social customs, both positive and negative, called *achara* and *anachara*. Not much work has been done on this important aspect of Indian tradition, but some of the *anacharas* of Kerala⁴⁴ are certainly distinct from the rest of the country.

The scriptural modes of worship and the canons of social usages may differ according to the Vedic *Sakhas*, *Smritis* and *Sutras*. And since different regions follow different texts, the difference in rituals and social customs is bound to perpetrate. Thus the diversity of regional cultures is built up not only by the non-Brahmanic local traditions but also by the Brahmanic scriptures.

Distribution of culture traits

If culture traits of the *tirthas* are plotted on the map of India the North-South divide would become amply clear. The lack of adequate data may not permit a thorough treatment of the subject, but we may examine here the distribution pattern of, at least, a few relatively known traits.

(1) Creating a *tirtha* by deifying land or natural objects : A large area is sanctified as *tirtha*. It retains its sacred character permanently. The sacred dwellings such as temples built on this place are of lesser significance. When temples in Kashi were destroyed by the Pathan and Moghul rulers, the *tirtha* maintained its sanctity irreducibly. It is said that there is not even as much space as a sesame seed in Kashi which has not a *linga* (the emblem of Shiva) every dust particle of this place is sacred. Thus, the sacred

is in-built with the natural objects and places, and hence the importance of geographic categories and the concepts like *mandala*, *kshetra*, etc.

This trait of deifying a horizontal space is peculiar to North India.

(2) The creation of a *tirtha* by building temples and housing the god is largely a South Indian tradition. The large temple complex and the walled sacred territory are the characteristic features of the South. The space outside the walled temple of Meenakshi in Madurai is not as sacred (or at all sacred) as the space outside the temple of Vishwanath in Kashi. Hence, the concepts like *mandala*, and *kshetra* are of little relevance in South India.⁴⁵ The gradation of sacred space is made there by concentric walls built around the main temple. What is most significant there in the sacred geography is the temple structure and within this the *garbhagriha*, the *prakara*, and the *gopura*. The *gopura* at the entrance of the temple has to be necessarily majestic and a replica of the entire sacred complex, because it is the gateway of the sacred, which people must see from a long distance. The *most sacred space is the sanctum sanctorum*.

This trait of deifying a vertical space is typically South Indian.

(3) The trait of circumambulating a large tract derives from the trait of deifying a horizontal space. Hence the North Indian custom of *panchakroshi* or *chaurasi-kroshi parikrama* is absent in the South.

(4) Organizing a number of shrines spread over in a large area and the varieties of sacred performance to be made in each of these shrines would demand a large number of specialists of various kinds such as pilgrim guides, pilgrim-priests specialized in different types of rituals, and several others associated with ritual services. Hence the organization of pilgrim services such as the institution of Pandas and the allied groups is an important element in North Indian *tirthas*.

(5) The contingent of temple functionaries of various kinds will be comparatively large in South India, because there the temple services have to be organized scrupulously.

(6) The nature of temple organization in South India necessitates the elaboration of worship and rituals largely connected with the life-cycle of gods and goddesses. There are various categories of temple-priests organized in hierarchical order, functionaries of various kinds associated with the management of food, decoration, recreation and visitation of the deity. This calls for the institution of Devadasis, heavy instrumental music in temple rituals, the practice of taking round the deity in a palanquin or a chariot, the celebration of *utsavas* of various kinds, and even the trait of constructing spacious *mandapa* for dance and music, and the *deepa-stambha* for decoration of light.

(7) Clustering of heterogeneous shrines, organizing *tirthas* within a *tirtha*, temples within a temple, and sharing a common space by the idols of different gods and goddesses belonging to different sects are the characteristic features of the North Indian *tirthas*.

(8) Distancing the heterogenous shrines, keeping the gods and goddesses of different sects at a distance is typically a South Indian trait. The sectarian distinction between the Shaivites and the Vaishnavites in South India is conspicuous and wide.

From the distribution of the *tirtha* traits it appears that South India has built up a tradition distinct from the North. Orissa in the east and Goa in the west seem to be a meeting ground of the two traditions. Such interpenetration of the northern and the southern traditions can be found in these eastern and western regions in other items of culture as well.

6

Unity in Diversities

Unity in diversities is the essence of India's cultural traditions. Despite all the diversities just mentioned, there is an overall unity of belief and practices at all levels. For instance, "in spite of local differentiation, the underlying ideas that guided the symbolic meaning of temple-forms were common between the North and the South. The significance of the images continued to be subject to the same ideals as before, though the artistic traditions under which these were executed differed widely".⁴⁶ In all the various forms of music and dance there is a unity of themes and melodic pattern and cadences. Similarly, whatever may be the variation in the modes of organizing the sacred, the source which hold them together is the body of Brahmanic scriptures.

Every civilization has its own method of handling diversities. Thus, while Semitic civilizations lay stress on the unification of characteristics, Sanskritic civilization, on the contrary, allows the diversities to perpetuate. The contrariety in the two modes of integration flows from the difference in the basic philosophy of the two systems concerning the knowledge of the sacred. For instance, while Semitic religions like Islam and Christianity claim to have revealed *the truth*, Sanskritic religion (popularly known as Hinduism or Brahmanism) profess no such revelation. The Hindu view is that the 'whole truth' is unknowable, and it is only the 'part truth' which may be known by mortals. Consequently there are different paths which lead to the Truth and one can journey along any path

one chooses. This freedom of belief and practices is clearly reflected in the conception of gods and the modes of devotion and worship. There is the nine-fold path of devotion known as *navadhabhakti* and one can follow any branch there of according to one's ability and aptitude. Brahmanism is perhaps the only religion which says that even enmity towards God may also lead to the attainment of salvation. The diversity is only in the means, the end being the same, namely the attainment of God.

Philosophical explanation apart, there have been conscious efforts to level down the diversities of regional traditions by establishing the sacred institution of *tirthas*. Although each region developed its own regional *tirtha*, built up around the local myths, yet the different regions of India were linked by establishing supra-regional *tirthas* and by inventing the myth of *avatara* which reduces all forms of regional gods and goddesses into universal Trinity. Thus, the four *dhamas* and the four *peethas* of the Adya Shankaracharya at the cardinal points and the twelve *jyotirlingas*, the 108 Shakta *peethas*, the 168 *pitri-tirthas*, the seven *mokshadayani puris*, and all the great river and mountains and oceans establish an intimate sacred network of relationship between the peoples of diverse regional cultures.

The luminaries who built up the institution of *tirtha* have enjoined *tirtha-padyayatra* (journeying to the holy places on foot) to ensure that the pilgrims interact closely with the peoples of different regions, traversing intensively and extensively, thus keeping up the currents of civilization in constant circulation. Even the traditionally prohibited places such as Anga, Vanga, Kalinga, Sauvira and Magadha were allowed for purposes of pilgrimage. Thus, virtually the whole of India was brought within the fold of *tirthayatra*—the wide spectrum of the sacred journey.

For the benefits of those who are unable to travel any long distance on pilgrimage, the *tirtha* comes to their door. And hence, there is a Dakshina-Kashi in the South, Uttara-Kashi and Gupta-Kashi in the northern Himalaya, a Gupta-Kashi in the east in Bhubaneshwara, a western Kashi in Nasik (also Paithan) in Maharashtra, and one more Kashi in Mandi in western Himalaya.

Pilgrimage to each of these places is endowed with the merits of the sacred journey attached to the Kashi of Vishwanath in Uttar Pradesh. The *Puranas* hold that Kashi and Kanchi are like the two eyes of Shiva. Similarly there are several Ganga rivers, each flowing in a large area and thus covering the whole of India. The one who is physically incapable to bathe even in a nearby Ganga may drink its water or just remember it in order to be freed from sins at once. The *Vishnu Purana* (II. 8. 120-1) says : The Ganga purifies all beings from day-to-day when its name is heard, when one desires to see it, when it is seen or touched, or when its waters are drunk, or when one plunges into it, or when one utters or sings its name; when people utter the name "Ganga", even though living at a distance of hundreds of *yojanas*, their sins, accumulated in three births, are destroyed. Hence "Ganga" is accessible everywhere, in all circumstances.

Similarly, the practice of throwing *asthis* in all the major rivers throughout the country and remembering one's ancestors by performing *sraddha* in different *tirthas* spread all over the land is the positive technique of holding the people of distant places together. Thus, no part of India is left unassociated with the loving memory of one's ancestors.

In conclusion : it is the institution of *tirtha* which, in an intensity beyond measure, binds this vast and varied country. There is nothing that can truly replace this natural and spontaneous sacred institution in its harmonious function of promoting the most sustainable unity.

NOTES

1. For the description of the sacred complex, see Vidyarthi (1961); for another dimension of the sacred see Saraswati (1975).
2. See, *A comparative dictionary of the Indo-Aryan languages*, R. L. Turner (1966), Oxford University Press; *Pali-English Dictionary*, T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (1959), London.
3. See, *Brhaddharma Purana* (5), Cf. Hazra (1963 : 404).
4. Cf., *The Institutes of Vishnu* 'LXII. 1-4); See also *The Institutes of Manu* (II. 58-59).
5. See, *Brhaddharma Purana* (5, 24). Hazra, *op. cit.*, pp. 404-409.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 404.
7. See, *Padma Purana* (ii. 39. 56-61), Cf. Kane (1953 : 564).
8. See, *Brhaddharma Purana* (7), Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 401.
9. Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 534-5.
10. May the divine waters be weal for us, for our help and for our drink, weal and health may they bring unto us. (Rigveda X. 9. 4). See also, Rigveda VIII. 47.49, X. 9.30.
11. Forth from the Hills of Snow they stream,
and meet in Sindhu here or there.
To me the sacred waters gave the balm that heals the heart's disease.
Whatever rupture I have had that injured eyes or heels or toes,
All this the Waters, skilfullest physicians, shall make well again.
All Rivers who have Sindhu for your Lady, Sindhu for your Queen.
Give us the balm that heals this ill, this boon let us enjoy from you.
(Atharvaveda, VI. 24. 1-3).
- Auspicious be the firmly seated 'Mountains, auspicious be the Rivers and Waters'.
(Atharvaveda, XIX. 10. 8).
May stainless waters cleanse us from defilement.
May they carry sin away from us, may they carry away from us the evil dream.
Look on me with a friendly eye,
O Waters, and touch my skin,
With your auspicious body. (Atharvaveda, XVI. 1.10-2).
12. See Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 562-4.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 730-825.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 564-5.
15. Cf. Aiyangara (194 : LVII-I.VIII).

16. This unequal treatment arose from various causes such as the localities where the authors lived, their familiarity with the holy places, and their predilections (Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 565).
17. See *Sanskrit English Dictionary*, Pt. I., P. K. Gode and C. G. Karwe (1957), Poona; also *Sabdakalpadruma*.
18. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, Vol. II. Franklin Edgerton (1970), Delhi.
19. Cf. Snellgrove (1959).
20. Cf. *Sabdakalpadruma*.
21. For an exhaustive list of Ganpati-*kshetra*, see Sharma (1975).
22. See, Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 730-825, also *Krtyakalpataru*.
23. See Snellgrove, *op. cit.*, X. 2-5.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. Cf. Sarabha's *Dohakosa*, see Buddhist Texts (Cassirer, 1954), p. 230-1.
27. Cf. Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 628.
28. The description is based largely on the pattern of the temples of Kerala, as described by Iyer (1977 : 17-8).
29. See Dhal (1977); also Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 694-9.
30. See Saraswati (1975).
31. Cf. Saraswati (1977 : 73-4).
32. See, for instance, Goswami and Morab (1975 : 11-48).
33. See Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 568-79.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 604-612; also *Krtyakalpataru*.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 574-75.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 655.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 697.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 697-8.
39. See Saraswati (1975).
40. *Ibid.*
41. For details, see Bose (1961); Saraswati (1978); also Saraswati and Behura (1963).
42. See Saraswati (1977).
43. See Iyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-22.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-58.
45. The *Pauranic tirthas* in South India are not much different from their counterparts in North India, but their number is comparatively small, and organization is predominantly on the pattern of temple-towns—greatest importance is attached to temples rather than on the *kshetra*. For details of the *Pauranic* holy places in South India, see Thakur (1977), also Kane, *op. cit.*, pp. 730-825; *Krtyakalpataru*; Sharma, *op. cit.*
46. Cf. Bose (1963 : 19).

REFERENCES

Aiyangara, K. V. Rangaswami 1942. *Introduction*. In K. V. Rangaswami Aiyangara (ed.) *Kṛtyakalpataru (Tirthavivechana kbanda)*, of Bhatta Lakshmidhara. Baroda.

Bose, N. K. 1961. *Peasant life in India: a study in Indian unity and diversity*. Calcutta.

1963. *Culture and society in India*. Calcutta.

Dhal, U. N. 1977. *Viraja-kshetra mahatmya of Brahmanda Purana: a survey*, *Purana* 19 (2), 292-304.

Goswami, B. B. and S. G. Morab 1975. *Chamundesvari temple in Mysore*. Calcutta.

Hazra, R. C. 1963. *Studies in the upa-puranas*. Calcutta.

Iyer, S. Venkatasubramonia 1977. *Religious art and culture*. Trivandrum.

Kane, P. V. 1953. *History of dharmashastra*, vol. IV. Poona.

Saraswati, Baidyanath 1975. *Kashi: myth and reality of a classical cultural tradition*. Simla.

1977. *Brahmanic ritual traditions: in the crucible of time*. Simla.

1978. *Pottery-making cultures and Indian civilization*. Delhi.

Saraswati, Baidyanath and Nab Kishore Behura 1963. *Pottery techniques in peasant India*. Calcutta.

Sharma, B. R. 1975. *Ganpati and his most sacred places for pilgrimage in India*, *Bhavan's Journal* 22 (3), 17-27.

Snellgrove, D. L. 1959. *The Hevajra Tantra: a critical study*. London.

Thakur, Umakant 1977. *The holy places of South India as depicted in the Skanda Purana*, *Purana* 19 (2), 305-20.

Vidyarthi, L. P. 1961. *The sacred complex in Hindu Gaya*. Bombay.

